***Fahrenheit 451, One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest,* and *Beloved: The Individual’s Quest for Freedom in Society***

Throughout history, a single, seemingly unanswerable question has rung through the centuries with a persistence that is sometimes violent but always onerous: *How is it possible to preserve individual freedom in society when society is itself built upon stability and order?* In other words, *can there be freedom without anarchy*? It is this dilemma which has fueled revolutions as epic as those of the “Arab Spring” and as commonplace as a teenager’s rebellion against his parents and which has provided the inspiration for words that still echo in our minds—*Give me liberty or give me death*, *I have a dream, L'État c'est moi.* It is this theme, then, around which three American novels—*Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* by Ken Kesey, and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison—collectively revolve. Rather than depicting the struggle between freedom and stability through a societal lens, however, the three authors instead distill the conflict to a human level by following the stories of an intimate collection of individuals. Thus, the stories of Sethe, Montag, and Chief Bromden are told not through sweeping political slogans or abstract theories but through raw, emotional outcries and scrutiny of the warped psychologies of individuals bludgeoned by oppression, slavery, and humiliation in their quests for independence.

Jane Austen: Marriage and Irony

In Emma, Mansfield Park, and Persuasion, Jane Austen exposes 19th century England’s social views and mores with regard to marriage and women’s expected role in society. Although marriage today may sometimes be considered outdated, in Austen’s time marriage was the only option for young women, especially those with no inheritance. Social status in the 19th century meant a great deal in everyday life, and those who possessed high status stood at an advantage in marriage as well as in other matters. Women with no dowry could be expected to have to work for the majority of their lives—unless they were lucky enough to find a wealthy man who would be willing to overlook the differences in status. This rarely happened during this time period. Although Austen depicts an era in which the institution of marriage was primarily a function of socioeconomic factors, she is a conservative novelist whose writings have radical undertones that criticize marriage and courtship as demeaning to women’s independence and social standing.

Magic Kingdoms: The Representation of Universal Forces in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Beloved*, and *Midnight’s Children*

“To understand just one life, you have to swallow the world.” — Salman Rushdie (121)

The inadequacy of literature to express the richness of reality has troubled writers for generations. Novels belonging to the genre of magical realism attempt to address this failing with particular respect to depictions of power, especially power that exists independently of human actions and institutions. The fantastical aspects of such novels arise from transcendent concepts — history and fate, hatred and love — rather than from conscious invocations. Their organic nature emphasizes their separateness from human planning and decisions, implying that the most powerful elements in society are also beyond human control.

“A Great City. A Great Desert”

Since the dawn of time, people have sought refuge in a group by building concentrated areas which later transformed into towns and cities. Thus the urban environment was born, and throughout history it has shaped human behavior and social status. In the books, *The Jungle,* by Upton Sinclair, *The Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison,and *How the Other Half Lives* by Jacob Riis, the cities rule their inhabitants and graphically describe the hardships that ordinary citizens face in this terrifying urban environment, where the minority (the rich and powerful) squeeze and squish the majority of the population for their own benefit. The main theme in the three books, that is of the “mercilessness of the city,” where social, economic, and political problems plague many of its citizens (Sinclair 189), is as relevant today as it was a hundred years ago.

When the Axe Came into the Forest: An Analysis of The Secret of

Possessing Joy, Far and Beyon', and The Rape of Fatimah in a Cultural Context

“The subject of rape was not polite dinner conversation. It

made people uncomfortable, and yet I wanted to understand

how it operated in our society to keep all women hostage”

-Sun Yung Shin

Alice Walker's The Secret of Possessing Joy, Unity Dow’s Far and Beyon', and Nabie Yayah Swaray's The Rape of Fatimah are the stories of African lives. In using certain story elements to their greatest effect, the authors use their voices to convey truths about the real world. The utilization of a setting that is hostile and aggressive towards women allows for the structure of the plot and conflict to arise as a reflective materialization of the existing values of a rape culture in place. The characters in turn are almost byproducts of these conflicts, representative of the lives of hundreds of thousands of women living today. In comprehension of this combination of story elements, the systematic nature of violence against women is revealed as the concept of culturally institutionalized gender-based violence (GBV) emerges and develops. As African or African-American writers, Walker, Dow, and Swaray, use their authentic voices to paralyze the readers in a world in which women are less than human, painting scenes so alarming to the universal conscience, that readers cannot help but ask questions and take a closer look at the types of systems that are in place and their own roles in these settings.